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SNIE, 2-5-61

14 September 1961

SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

SOVIET REACTIONS TO CERTAIN US
COURSES OF ACTION

ACCOUNTABLE DOCUMENT

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NOTE: This is the final version of the estimate and additional text will not be circulated.

Central Intelligence Agency

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C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

14 September 1961

SUBJECT: SNIE 2-5-61: SOVIET REACTIONS TO CERTAIN
US COURSES OF ACTION

THE PROBLEM

To estimate Soviet reactions to a US decision, in the near future, to mobilize four National Guard divisions, and to dispatch several regular divisions to Europe.

THE ESTIMATE

1. Dispatch of substantial additional US troops units to Europe, and the callup of a force on the scale of one-fourth of the entire present US divisional strength, would be seen by the Soviets as another in a series of moves intended to impress them with American firmness on the Berlin issue and to bolster US calls on its allies for strengthening their forces for the same

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purpose. At the same time, they would recognize that these measures substantially augmented conventional military strength in Western Europe.

2. The Soviets in their response would seek to dispel any notion that they could be intimidated by such Western measures, and to prove that they could match or overmatch them. A number of steps to this end would be open to them. They might dispatch substantial reinforcements to the Soviet forces in East Germany, and publicly announce the fact. The Soviets might also announce a partial callup of reserves. They might selectively reveal important strengths in the Soviet forces, such as medium range ballistic missiles within range of Western Europe.

3. The Soviets would interpret the American mobilization and reinforcement primarily as an attempt to impress them with US will and determination in the Berlin crisis. And we believe that the Soviets would in fact raise their estimate of such US determination. They might conclude from the augmentation of conventional forces that the US, at least, was more willing than they had previously estimated to engage in limited military conflict in defense of the Western position in Berlin, and to run the risk of subsequent escalation, if necessary, into nuclear

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war. However, we cannot exclude the possibility that they might conclude from an augmentation of nonnuclear strength that the US would limit itself to actions short of nuclear war. Their judgment would be affected by other US steps, both political and additional military measures designed to enhance our strategic nuclear capability. No matter which conclusion they reached, however, we doubt that they would respond to this action by changing their overt position on Berlin, or by displaying a more forthcoming attitude toward negotiations. On the contrary, with Soviet prestige already heavily committed, they would fear that such a reaction to the US reinforcement would appear as a sign of weakness. In any case, the Soviets would take this consideration into account in deciding how to respond to a Western initiative on negotiations at this time.

4. Furthermore, in the absence of other indications to the contrary, they would probably conclude that their chances for making progress toward their objective via early negotiations had diminished. Thus the immediate effect might be to strengthen the present tendency of the Soviets to rely on unilateral actions to move toward their objectives in Berlin. Simultaneously, however, they would probably be impressed with

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the need for caution in determining which actions could be undertaken without undue risk.

5. The USSR's general position on the Berlin issue will, of course, continue to be the product of calculations combining its own minimum and ultimate objectives, assessment of its own strong and weak points and tactical opportunities, and estimates of Western resolve and capability. The posited US move would be only one of many developments which are constantly affecting these calculations. In this connection, the Soviets would be alert to note whether the US's NATO allies followed suit with corresponding increases in strength.

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